

# Environmental BULLETIN:

# YARD CARE

CLEAN TEXAS 2000 Information Center 1-800-64-TEXAS

Every year in Texas nearly four million tons of yard trimmings in the form of leaves, grass, tree limbs, weeds and other organic debris end up

in Texas landfills. That's about 20 percent of all trash in municipal landfills. It costs Texans about \$250 million a year! As the gates on many landfills clang shut and communities continue to oppose the creation of new landfills, putting these yard trimmings to beneficial use in your own yard makes sense and cents for Texans.

## Don't Bag It! Leave It a Lawn.

The Texas Agricultural Extension Service's Don't Bag It program was designed to keep grass clippings out of landfills. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn returns valuable nutrients to the soil, reduces the need for fertilizer, reduces watering, saves space in your community landfill and is easier than bagging!

The Don't Bag It program is a combination of common-sense watering, mowing and fertilizing. The frequency of watering and mowing will depend on the type of grass in your yard.

## Why Compost?

Compost saves time and money by providing an almost constant source of free fertilizer and soil conditioner. Compost helps your plants grow by loosening the soil, improves moisture retention in your soil, can reduce your water bills and reduces the potential for contamination of our waterways and drinking water.

## What Is Compost?

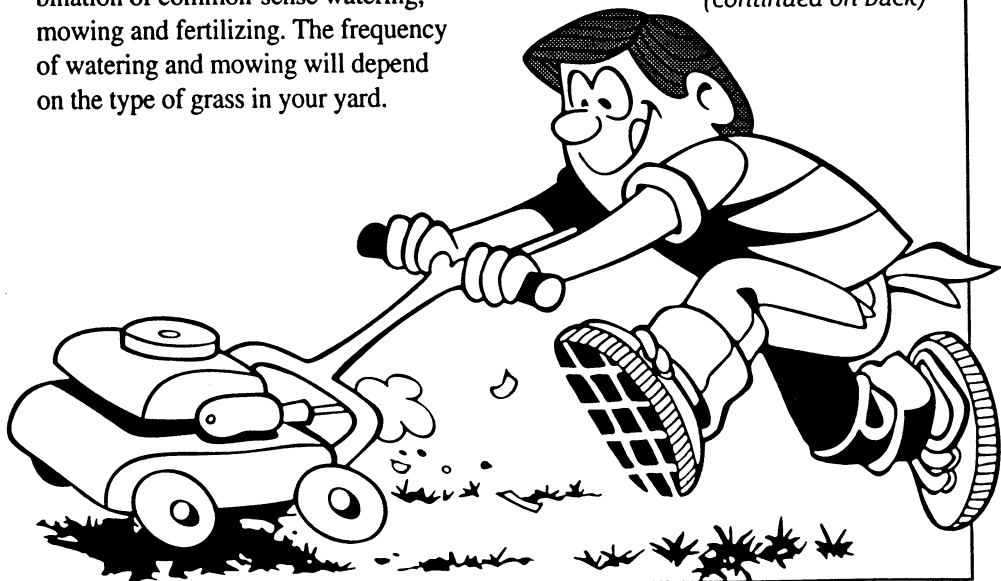
Compost is what happens when leaves, grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, wood chips, straw and small twigs are combined, then allowed to break down into a crumbly, dark-brown humus material with soil-like texture.

Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments. You

*(continued on back)*

## CLEAN TEXAS 2000 Easy Compost Recipe

- 🌿 Find a well-draining spot out of direct sunlight.
- 🌿 Start with a layer of coarse material, like twigs, straw and leaves.
- 🌿 Add a layer of grass clippings and leaves, mixed with egg shells, coffee grounds, tea bags and fruit and vegetable scraps from your kitchen, along with water and soil or old compost.
- 🌿 Add more leaves, grass clippings and kitchen scraps as they become available.
- 🌿 Turn the mixture on a regular basis to provide spaces for air to circulate.
- 🌿 Be sure it stays moist, like a damp sponge.
- 🌿 For best results, try to build your pile so that it's at least three feet wide and three feet deep. If it's smaller, you'll still get compost, but it will take longer.
- 🌿 Your compost will naturally heat up and decrease in volume as it breaks down.
- 🌿 You can simply rake your ingredients into a mound.
- 🌿 Compost bins are not necessary to make good compost, but they can help.



can use it instead of commercial fertilizers. Compost is the natural recycling of organic wastes.

#### Layers in a Working Compost Bin

1. Bottom layer of twigs, woody brush, plant stalks, straw and leaves, 6-8 inches deep.
2. Grass clippings and leaves mixed with egg shells, tea bags and fruit and vegetable scraps, 2 inches deep.
3. Keep moist, like a damp sponge.
4. Layer of soil, 1 inch deep.
5. More leaves, grass clippings and kitchen scraps as they become available.

#### The Wrong Ingredients For Compost

- ❧ Avoid meat, fish, bones, dairy foods and oils.
- ❧ Avoid pet feces or used kitty litter.
- ❧ Sawdust or chips from painted, treated or pressurized wood should not be composted.
- ❧ Avoid weeds that have gone to seed or weeds that spread by runners.
- ❧ Avoid diseased or insect-infested plants.

#### Miscellaneous Compost Tips

- ❧ The smaller the size of the materials you use, the faster they will compost.
- ❧ If you run a lawn mower through a pile of leaves before adding them to your compost, you will see a quicker breakdown.
- ❧ Turn mixture on a regular basis to provide spaces for air to circulate.

❧ Use a chipper or shredder for larger woody material. Either rent one or go in with a neighbor to buy one.

❧ You don't need to add worms or bugs; they'll come naturally to let you know everything is working fine.

## Watering Tips for Lawns and Plants

❧ Water infrequently and deeply to a depth of 4-6 inches. You should adjust your watering to the needs of your plants and soil, but a good general rule is to water every five to six days in hot weather, less frequently in cooler weather. Infrequent watering lets plants develop deep roots that are disease-resistant and drought- and freeze-tolerant.

❧ If plants – and particularly turf – need water more than every five or six days, consider replacing them with lower water-use plants and grass.

❧ Water early in the morning when possible.

Evenings are not a good time to water because lawns and plants left wet overnight are more disease-prone.

❧ Use sprinklers that send water close to the ground rather than high in the air. Big drops are better than fine mists.

❧ Flower beds and gardens are ideal locations for drip irrigation or soaker hoses.

❧ Use brooms – not water hoses – for sweeping walks.

## What Is Mulch?

Mulch is any organic material – including wood chips, grass clippings, leaves and compost – that is spread over the surface of the soil.

❧ Mulching is one of the cheapest water conservation techniques known. A layer of mulch locks in moisture and reduces soil temperatures, reducing plants' need for water.

❧ Mulch keeps down weeds by blocking their sunlight.

❧ Mulch serves as an anti-freeze for plants in winter by helping maintain constant soil temperature.

## How Do I Use Mulches?

Grass clippings can be spread regularly in thin layers over gardens and flower beds. Grass can be mixed with leaves or wood chips and spread in a thicker layer. Avoid layers of grass more than one inch thick, for they can keep water from your plants.

Leaves and wood chips can be spread as mulch up to several inches thick. They will gradually settle and decompose, enriching the soil. Leaves can be spread as they fall or bagged and stored for later use.

#### Watering Frequencies for Common Texas Turf Grasses

Buffalo -----	Every 21-45 days
Common Bermuda --	Every 7-10 days
Zoysia -----	Every 7-10 days
"TIF" Bermuda -----	Every 5 days
St. Augustine -----	Every 5 days
Tall Fescue -----	Every 4 days



The Environmental Bulletin series is part of CLEAN TEXAS 2000, a statewide program to reduce the pollution generated in Texas and provide citizens with the information they need to personally care for the Texas environment.

Every business, industry, local government, organization and citizen is invited to become a partner in CLEAN TEXAS 2000.

For more information, call 1-800-64-TEXAS.



TEXAS  
NATURAL  
RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION  
COMMISSION

CLEAN TEXAS 2000 Information Center  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

The TNRCC is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability in employment or in the provision of services, programs, or activities. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this document may be requested in alternate formats by contacting the TNRCC at (512)239-0010, FAX (512)239-1020 or 1-800-RELAY-TX (TDD), or by writing TNRCC, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, TX 78711-3087.